

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 04518 222248Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DOE-15 SOE-02 OES-07 AID-05 IO-13
ACDA-12 NRC-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
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-----092333 231216Z /14
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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 385

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FOLLOWING CABLE SENT ACTION NEW DELHI INFO CALCUTTA MADRAS
MAR 22 FROM BOMBAY REPEATED TO YOU

QUOTE

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: MNUC, PINT, IN
SUBJECT: INDIAN NUCLEAR AFFAIRS

1. THE FREE PRESS GROUP OF NEWSPAPERS ADDED THEIR VOICE TO THE
HAND WRINGING AND SPECULATION OVER RAJA RAMANNA'S TRANSFER FROM
BARC TO THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE IN NEW DELHI. THE FREE PRESS
BULLETIN, THE AFTERNOON TABLOID OF THIS GROUP, GAVE A NEW TWIST TO
SPECULATION OVER RAMANNA'S TRANSFER IN ITS MARCH 21 EDITION.
IN AN ACCGOSS THE TOPE OF THE FRONTPAGE PHOTO STORY
ENTITLED "SETHNA TOO GOING?" THE FPB SUGGESTED THAT THE IAEC
CHAIRMAN'S HEAD WOULD ROLL NEXT. THE FREE PRESS BULLETIN SAID
"HIGHER UPS IN NEW DELHI ARE BENT ON REMOVING BOTH RAMANNA AND
SETHNA FROM THE NUCLEAR FIELD."

2. PARADOXICALLY, THE FREE PRESS BULLETIN STORY THEN PLAYS UP
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ALLEGED DIFFERENCES BETWEEN INDIA'S TWO TOP NUCLEAR
SCIENTISTS. SETHNA IS TO BE AXED BECAUSE OF HIS SUPPORT FOR THE
EMERGENCY WHICH THE FREE PRESS BULLETIN BELIEVES RAMANNA OPPOSED.
SETHNA'S FLAGRANTE DELICTO IS SAID TO BE HIS SPEECH AT A GATHERING
ORGANIZED BY THE LOCAL CONGRESS PARTY COMMITTEE TO
CELEBRATE "TEN YEARS OF SCIENTIFIC PROGRESS" AT THE
COMPLETION OF INDIRA'S FIRST DECADE AS PRIME MINISTER.

COMMENT: CONGEN ATTENDED THIS EVENT AND RECALLS THAT BOTH SETHNA AND RAMANNA HAD EQUALLY PROMINENT ROLES ALONG WITH SOME OF INDIA'S OTHER TOP SCIENTISTS, E.G. PROFESSOR M.G.K. MENON, SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ELECTRONICS. END COMMENT.

3. THE MARCH 22 MORNING PAPER OF THE FREE PRESS GROUP, THE FREE PRESS JOURNAL, ALSO HAS A FRONTPAGE STORY ON THE RAMANNA TRANSFER. IT GIVES AS THE MAIN REASON FOR HIS TRANSFER "HIS REPORTED INSISTENCE THAT NO INTERNATIONAL INSPECTION OF NUCLEAR FACILITIES IN BARC SHOULD BE ALLOWED, AS FUNDAMENTAL BASIC RESEARCH WAS GOING ON IN SOME OF THE KEY FACILITIES IN BARC." THE FREE PRESS JOURNAL SPECULATES THAT RAMANNA'S SUCCESSOR AT BARC WILL BE EITHER DR. P.K. IYENGAR, DIRECTOR OF PHYSICS AND MEDICINE AT BARC OR DR. S. FAREEDUDDIN, DIRECTOR OF THE HEAVY WATERS PROJECT. THE FREE PRESS JOURNAL NOTES THAT IYENGAR IS A PHYSICS SCIENTIST AND FAREEDUDDIN IS AN ENGINEER WHO, IN THE PAPER'S VIEW, WOULD BE LESS ACCEPTABLE TO THE BARC SCIENTISTS.

4. THE BOMBAY EDITION OF THE INDIAN EXPRESS AGAIN GAVE HEAVY PLAY TO NUCLEAR MATTERS IN ITS ISSUE OF MARCH 22. IT REPRODUCES THE "ECONOMIST" OF LONDON REPORT ON WINDSCALES WHICH OF COURSE RECOMMENDS THAT THE UK GO AHEAD WITH PLANS FOR REPROCESSING AT THAT FACILITY. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 NEW DE 04518 222248Z

TODAY'S EXPRESS ALSO REPORTS IN AN NEGATIVE LIGHT THE NRC HEARINGS OF MARCH 20 ON XSNM 1060, IN A NEW DELHI DATE LINE STORY WHICH ALLEGES THAT FURTHER DELAYS WILL INTENSIFY EXISTING PROBLEMS IN URANIUM SUPPLY.

5. COMMENT: RAMANNA'S TRANSFER AND THE ATTENDANT RUMORS OF OTHER CHANGES IN INDIA'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM HAVE TOP-LEVEL ATTENTION IN THE LOCAL BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL COMMUNITIES AS WELL AS AMONG SCIENTISTS. MANY LEADERS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY REGARD THE HANDLING OF THE RAMANNA TRANSFER AS ANOTHER SIGN OF AWKWARDNESS IN THE JANATA GOVERNMENT. THEY HAVE FREELY COMPARED IT WITH THE DISMISSAL OF J.R.D. TATA AS HEAD OF AIR-INDIA. RAMANNA ENJOYS GENUINE RESPECT AND ADMIRATION HERE. HE IS CONSIDERED TO BE A SCIENTIST WHO HAS KEPT HIMSELF ABOVE POLITICS AND PETTY BUREAUCRATIC SQUABBLES. IN ADDITION, HE IS A PATRON OF THE ARTS (MUSIC) AND IS AN ACKNOWLEDGED EXPERT ON INDIAN'S CULTURAL TRADITIONS. PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT A MAN WITH THIS BACKGROUND SHOULD HAVE BEEN TREATED WITH GREATER CONSIDERATION IN SUCH A BASIC CHANGE.

6. MANY PEOPLE HERE WOULD GIVE SOME CREDENCE TO

THE FREE PRESS BULLETIN ALLEGATION THAT SETHNA WAS OFTEN TOO CLOSE TO INDIRA AND MANY OF HER REPRESSIVE POLICIES. THEY SEE HIS CURRENT CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT AS INDIRECTLY SUPPORTIVE OF INDIRA. HE HAS FREQUENTLY IN THE PAST SIX MONTHS ATTEMPTED TO GET THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND SOME OF THE STATE GOVERNMENTS TO CRACK DOWN ON UNIONS IN THE ATOMIC ENERGY ESTABLISHMENT THAT HAVE CAUSED MAJOR DISRUPTIONS IN OPERATIONS AT KOTA AND HYDRABAD AND PERHAPS ELSEWHERE. HE HAS BEEN SCATHINGLY CRITICAL OF THE GOVERNMENT'S REFUSAL TO TAKE ENERGETIC ACTIONS AGAINST UNION ACTIONS WHICH HE BELIEVES ARE DISRUPTING PROGRAMS OF THE HIGHEST IMPORTANCE TO THE NATION. NEVERTHELESS, THE CONGEN HAS NEVER HEARD ANYONE ALLEGE THAT SETHNA HAD ACUTALLY TAKEN A POLITICAL STAND FAVORING INDIRA. RATHER MOST LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 04 NEW DE 04518 222248Z

OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT HE HAS GOTTEN HIMSELF TOO CLOSE TO THE LINE ON MANY OCCASIONS.

7. SETHNA ENJOYS BROADER AND MORE ACTIVE SUPPORT IN THE BUSINESS AND FINANNUAL COMMUNITIES THAN RAMANNA. SETHNA HAS BROUGHT PRIVATE INDUSTRY INTO THE SUPPLY BUSINESS FOGINDIA'S ATOMIC PROGRAM ON A LARGE SCALE.

MANY BUSINESSMEN HERE HAVE COMPLIMAENTED HIM TO ME FOR HIS EFFORTS TO GIVE THE PRIVATE SECTOR A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN INDIA'S ATOMIC PROGRAM. THESE PEOPLE WOULD CERTAINLY DO WHAT THEY CAN TO KEEP SETHNA IN HIS PRESENT OPPOSITION,IF HE WISHES TO STAY THERE AFTER THE DEBRIS SETTLES.

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